

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 065699
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TO AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE PRIORITY
AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY

UNCLAS STATE 065699

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, VN, LA, US

SUBJECT: PRESS CONFERENCE MARCH 23 RE PRESIDENTIAL
COMMISSION ON MIA'S

1. FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT OF REMARKS OF PRESS BY
PRESIDENT CARTER AND LEONARD WOODCOCK MARCH 23 RE THE
RECENTLY CONCLUDED VISIT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA OF THE PRE-
SIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON MIA'S.

2. BEGAN TEXT:

THE PRESIDENT: I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A BRIEF REPORT ON
WHAT I CONSIDER TO BE A SUPERB MISSION TO VIETNAM AND LAOS
ON THE PART OF LEONARD WOODCOCK AND SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD,
MARIAN EDELMAN, AMBASSADOR YOST, CONGRESSMAN MONTGOMERY, TO
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 STATE 065699

INQUIRE ABOUT THE ACCOUNTING FOR AMERICAN SERVICE PEOPLE
WHO WERE MISSING IN ACTION, AND ALSO TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK
FOR FUTURE NORMALIZATION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH
THOSE TWO COUNTRIES.

EVERY HOPE THAT WE HAD FOR THE MISSION HAS BEEN REALIZED.
THE COMMISSION MEMBERS AND THE STAFF WERE RECEIVED WITH
GREAT FRIENDSHIP. THE VIETNAMESE DELIVERED TO THE
COMMISSION 12 BODIES. ELEVEN OF THEM HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED

AS AMERICAN SERVICEMEN. ONE BODY IS NOT AN AMERICAN SERVICEMAN AND WILL BE RETURNED.

WE HAVE NOTIFIED THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE ERROR AND IT WAS AN HONEST MISTAKE. POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES ARE CONTINUING IN HAWAII. WE FEEL THAT WITHOUT DELAY THIS IS A VERY CAREFUL AND METICULOUS PROCESS, THAT WE CAN NOTIFY THE FAMILIES WHEN POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION IS ASSURED.

THE OTHER ELEVEN BODIES ARE AMERICAN SERVICE PEOPLE AND WE THINK WE KNOW WHO THEY ARE, BUT BEFORE THE FAMILIES ARE NOTIFIED WE WANT TO BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN.

THE ONE BODY THAT WAS IN ERROR, THE FAMILY IS BEING NOTIFIED ABOUT THAT ERROR.

THE VIETNAMESE HAVE NOT TIED TOGETHER ECONOMIC ALLOCATIONS OF AMERICAN FUNDS WITH THE MIA QUESTION. WE BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE ACTED IN GOOD FAITH. THEY HAVE PROMISED TO SET UP A PERMANENT STUDY MECHANISM BY WHICH THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT CAN PROVIDE INFORMATION THAT WE HAVE ABOUT THE POTENTIAL WHEREABOUTS OR IDENTIFY OF SERVICEMEN WHO WERE LOST, AND THE VIETNAMESE HAVE PROMISED TO COOPERATE IN PURSUING THE EVIDENCE THAT WE MIGHT PRESENT TO THEM IN THE FUTURE.
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 STATE 065699

THEY HAVE ALSO SUGGESTED THAT WE REINITIATE DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS IN PARIS WITHOUT DELAY TO RESOLVE OTHER ISSUES THAT MIGHT BE AN OBSTACLE OF PEACE BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES, AND FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES AND NORMALIZATION RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

I WILL RESPOND IMMEDIATELY TO PREMIER PHAM VAN DONG THAT WE ACCEPT THEIR INVITATION AND THAT THESE DISCUSSIONS WILL COMMENCE. THERE ARE NO PRECONDITIONS REQUESTED AND THERE WILL CERTAINLY BE NO PRECONDITIONS ON OUR PART FOR THESE TALKS IN PARIS.

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE MY SINCERE THANKS TO CHAIRMAN LEONARD WOODCOCK AND TO THE COMMISSION MEMBERS. THEY MET WITH ALMOST EVERY CONCEIVABLE INTERESTED GROUP BEFORE THEY DEPARTED FROM THE UNITED STATES, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FAMILIES OF SERVICEMEN WHO ARE MISSING IN ACTION, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AND OTHERS, AND THEY FORMED A TEAM WHICH WORKED IN REMARKABLE CONCERT AND PERFORMED THEIR ASSIGNMENT IN AN ABSOLUTELY SUPERLATIVE WAY.

AT THIS TIME I WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE TO THE GROUP CHAIRMAN LEONARD WOODCOCK, WHO WILL BE AVAILABLE TO

ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TRIP.

LATER ON THIS AFTERNOON, A COMPLETE WRITTEN REPORT BY THE COMMISSION TO ME WILL BE MADE PUBLIC.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

QUESTION: CAN YOU TELL US WHAT BODY IT WAS THAT WAS RETURNED? WAS THAT A VIETNAMESE?

MR. WOODCOCK: THE INDICATION IS IT IS A PERSON WHO IS UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 STATE 065699

APPROXIMATELY 50 YEARS OLD AND A VIETNAMESE. I MIGHT EMPHASIZE, AS FAR AS ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ARE CONCERNED, WE ARE ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT THIS WAS A HUMAN ERROR AND SIMPLY UNDERSCORES THE ENORMITY OF THE TASK OF RECOVERING THOSE MISSING IN ACTION.

I THINK IT IS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN THAT THOSE LOST IN WORLD WAR II AND IN THE KOREAN WAR, 22 PERCENT WERE FINALLY NOT ACCOUNTED FOR. IN THIS WAR, THE NUMBER IS LESS THAN 4-1/2 PERCENT.

OF COURSE, YOU HAVE SUBSTANTIAL LAND AREAS. IN THE CASE OF LAOS, IT IS A HUGH LAND AREA WITH A VERY SMALL POPULATION, NO MORE THAN 3-1/2 MILLION, AND THE DIFFICULTIES ARE CONSIDERABLE. WE HOPE WE HAVE--I THINK WE HAVE PLACED ON TRACK THE SOLUTION TO THIS QUESTION.

QUESTION: HAVE YOU SUBMITTED THE 12TH NAME ON OUR LIST TO TELL THE VIETNAMESE THAT THAT PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL HAS NOT BEEN RETURNED? YOU HAVE 11 THAT ARE ACCOUNTED FOR FROM THE LIST OF THOSE MISSING IN ACTION.

MR. WOODCOCK: THAT IS CORRECT.

QUESTION: HAVE YOU TOLD THEM THAT THE 12TH NAME --

MR. WOODCOCK: WHEN WE WERE ACQUAINTED WITH THIS BY THE CENTRAL IDENTIFICATION LABORATORIES IN HONOLULU, A MESSAGE WAS IMMEDIATELY SENT FROM THE COMMISSION THROUGH OUR NORMAL PROCEDURES THROUGH PARIS TO THE VIETNAMESE, YES.

QUESTION: ARE YOU AND THE COMMISSION SATISFIED, CONVINCED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM HAS DONE ITS BEST OR REASONABLY DONE ITS BEST TO ACCOUNT FOR ALL OF THE MIA'S? UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 05 STATE 065699

MR. WOODCOCK: AT THIS POINT?

QUESTION: YES.

MR. WOODCOCK: WE ARE SATISFIED THAT WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO DATE, PARTICULARLY WITHIN THE LAST FEW DAYS, PLUS THEIR ASSURANCE THAT THERE WILL BE RENEWED EFFORTS, WHICH IS STILL IN THE FUTURE, WE ARE SATISFIED WITH THE AGREEMENT TO SET UP THE PROCESS.

WE HAVE RECOMMENDED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT THEY BE INVITED, FOR EXAMPLE, TO SEND REPRESENTATIVES TO OUR CENTRAL IDENTIFICATION LABORATORIES IN HONOLULU BECAUSE THEY DO REALLY QUITE EXTRAORDINARY THINGS WITH REGARD TO IDENTIFICATION ON EVIDENCE THAT AT FIRST BLUSH WOULD SEEM TO ME TO BE VERY LITTLE.

QUESTION: LET ME TRY FROM THE OTHER WAY. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE HOLDING BACK, EITHER INFORMATION OR AMERICAN MEN?

MR. WOODCOCK: IT IS QUITE OBVIOUS, WITH REGARD, FOR EXAMPLE, TO THE 24TH BODY, THAT THEY HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THAT FOR SOME TIME. AND ON THE LAST EVENING, LATE IN THE LAST EVENING, WHEN THEY INFORMED US THAT MR. GOUGLEMAN DIED IN THE SOUTH LAST JUNE AND THEY ALSO SAID THEY WOULD TURN OVER THAT SET OF REMAINS, IT IS QUITE OBVIOUS THAT HAD BEEN HELD BACK. WE BELIEVE FROM THIS POINT, PARTICULARLY IF WE CAN HAVE AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP, THAT THAT WILL BE ENDED.

QUESTION: MR. WOODCOCK, DID YOU BRING BACK ANY INFORMATION ON ANY GIS WHO MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN TO STAY THERE?

MR. WOODCOCK: THEY WERE QUERIED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 06 STATE 065699

DESERTERS WHO HAD JOINED THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY. THEY SAID THEY WERE NOT AWARE OF ANY. THEY DID SAY THAT ALL AMERICANS WHO HAD REGISTERED WITH THEM HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO LEAVE.

QUESTION: DO YOU COME AWAY THEN WITH THE VIEW TO THE CENTRAL QUESTION THAT THE MIA'S REALLY ARE ALL DEAD?

MR. WOODCOCK: THAT IS THE GENERAL CONCLUSION OF THE COMMISSION.

QUESTION: MR. WOODCOCK, YESTERDAY YOU REFUSED TO CHARACTERIZE YOUR MISSION AS A SUCCESS. TODAY THE PRESIDENT CALLS IT A GREAT SUCCESS. HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR MIND,

BY ANY CHANCE?

MR. WOODCOCK: I THINK IT IS A SUCCESS IN THE TERMS OF WHAT WE ESTABLISHED FOR OURSELVES. I SAID ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION WHEN WE LEFT WE WERE SEEKING A KEY TO THE SOLUTION OF THE MIA PROBLEM, AND THROUGH THAT HOPING TO BUILDING A BRIDGE HEADED TOWARD NORMALIZATION.

WE THINK THAT HAS BEEN DONE. BUT OBVIOUSLY WHAT WILL HAPPEN FROM NOW ON WILL DEPEND UPON FUTURE EVENTS, NOT UNILATERAL FUTURE EVENTS BUT BILATERAL FUTURE EVENTS.

QUESTION: THE QUESTION IS, WHAT WAS UPPERMOST IN THE MINDS OF THIS GOVERNMENT IN SENDING YOU TO GET AN ACCOUNTING OF THE MIA'S OR TO GET STARTED ON THE ROAD TOWARD NORMALIZATION?

MR. WOODCOCK: I DON'T THINK YOU CAN SEPARATE THE ONE FROM THE OTHER. OBVIOUSLY, THERE HAS TO BE A SOLUTION TO THE ONE TO MAKE THE OTHER POSSIBLE. IT IS MY OWN PERSONAL CONCLUSION IT IS IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST OF THIS COUNTRY TO HAVE A STABLE SOUTHEAST ASIA. YOU CANNOT HAVE A STABLE SOUTHEAST ASIA WITHOUT HAVING STABILITY WITH REGARD TO UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 07 STATE 065699

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.

QUESTION: WHEN YOU SAID YOU BELIEVED THE GENERAL CONCLUSION IS THE MIA'S ARE ALL DEAD, HOW MANY DOES THAT INCLUDE BESIDES THE 11 THAT WERE BROUGHT BACK?

MR. WOODCOCK: THE TOTAL NUMBER THAT WERE UNACCOUNTED FOR INCLUDING CIVILIANS AT THE POINT WHEN WE WENT THERE WAS 2,546.

QUESTION: YOU BELIEVE THAT ALL OF THESE ARE DEAD?

MR. WOODCOCK: WE DO NOT THINK THAT THERE ARE ANY AMERICANS LEFT ALIVE IN EITHER VIETNAM OR LAOS WHO ARE BEING HELD AGAINST THEIR WILL.

QUESTION: WHY CAN'T THEIR GRAVES BE FOUND?

MR. WOODCOCK: THAT PROCESS WE HAVE UNDERWAY.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE THICK FOLIAGE OF JUNGLE OVER SO MUCH OF THE LAND AREA, WHEN THAT TOTAL NUMBER INCLUDES THOSE TWO LOST AT SEA, WE START WITH A NUMBER OF WHICH BASED UPON ORDINARY EVIDENCE THERE COULD BE NO HOPE OF FINDING.

QUESTION: WHEN DID THE QUESTION OF SENDING NEGOTIATORS BACK TO PARIS COME UP AND IN WHAT CONTEXT WAS IT; WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM? WOULD THAT BE SORT OF A START OF

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS? WHAT ARE THE MAJOR QUESTIONS? THE AID QUESTION?

MR. WOODCOCK: WITH REGARD TO THE DISCUSSIONS IN PARIS, THAT HAS NEVER BEEN STOPPED. THERE WAS A DISCUSSION LAST NOVEMBER WHICH WAS NOT CONTINUED. THEN THERE WERE PREPARATORY DISCUSSIONS LEADING TO THE VISIT OF THIS COMMISSION. SO THAT CONTINUING NEGOTIATIONS OR DISCUSSIONS
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 08 STATE 065699

IN PARIS IS NOT NEW. THAT IS SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN DONE SPORADICALLY NOW OVER SEVERAL YEARS.

QUESTION: WHEN YOU SAID YOU ESTABLISHED A BRIDGEHEAD TOWARD NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS, DOES THAT APPLY TO LAOS AS WELL AS VIETNAM?

MR. WOODCOCK: WITH REGARD TO LAOS WE HAD A RELATIVELY BRIEF FORMAL DISCUSSION IN WHICH THEY LAID DOWN THE POSITION THEY HAD BEEN HOLDING. OUR INFORMAL RELATIONSHIP AND DISCUSSIONS WERE VERY FRANK. THEY INDICATED TO US THAT THEY WOULD SET UP AN AGENCY FOR THE PURPOSE OF SEEING WHAT COULD BE DONE RELATIVE TO THE RECOVERY OF THOSE MISSING IN ACTION. THEN THEY CONFIRMED THAT IN AN OFFICIAL BROADCAST ON THE DAY AFTER WE HAD LEFT.

WE CAME AWAY WITH SOME HOPE WHICH WE THINK HAS BEEN CONFIRMED, BUT ALL OF THAT LIES IN THE FUTUR .

QUESTION: I WOULD LIKE TO ASK SENATOR MANSFIELD SOMETHING.

MR. SCHECTER: THIS WILL BE THE LAST QUESTION.

QUESTION: SENATOR, DID YOU FIND ANY EXTRAORDINARY AMOUNT OF BITTERNESS ON THE PART OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WITH WHOM YOU TALKED OR DO YOU THINK IF WE ESTABLISHED NORMAL RELATIONS WE CAN HAVE A VERY FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP WITH VIETNAM?

SENATOR MANSFIELD: LESS BITTERNESS THAN I THOUGHT WOULD BE NOTICEABLE.

AND THE ANSWER TO THE SECOND PART OF YOUR QUESTION, YES.

QUESTION: SENATOR MANSFIELD, WHAT DO YOU THINK PERSONALLY OF THE UNITED STATES GIVING FINANCIAL OR ECONOMIC AID TO
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 09 STATE 065699

VIETNAM?

SENATOR MANSFIELD: IT DEPENDS WHAT CHANNELS YOU WANT TO
USE. I THINK THE PRESENT CHANNELS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL
AGENCIES IS THE CORRECT ONE. WHAT WILL COME OUT LATER
WILL BE DETERMINED BY WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE MEANTIME.

THE PRESS: THANK YOU.
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